INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MORMON STUDIES

Volume 3

Spring 2010

PUBLICATION DETAILS

The *International Journal of Mormon Studies* is a European based internationally focused, peer-reviewed online and printed scholarly journal, which is committed to the promotion of interdisciplinary scholarship by publishing articles and reviews of current work in the field of Mormon studies. With high quality international contributors, the journal explores Mormon studies and its related subjects. In addition, *IJMS* provides those who submit manuscripts for publication with useful, timely feedback by making the review process constructive. To submit a manuscript or review, including book reviews please email them for consideration in the first instance to submissions@ijmsonline.org.

Published in the United Kingdom.

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EDITORIAL

David M. Morris
Editor

Once again, it is with great pleasure that we publish another issue of the *International Journal of Mormon Studies* (IJMS). This issue brings together a combination of scholars from different parts of the world and academic disciplines. Drawn from Mormon and non–Mormon perspectives, the articles found herein provide interesting insights to Mormonism globally, encouraging further attention and examination. Following on from the successful *European Mormon Studies Association* (EMSA) conference in Torino, Italy (2009), we have published here many of those papers that were presented during that conference. We are grateful for the submissions and support.

Like all aspects of modern life, and the worldwide recession, financial constraints have not left a journal as this and organisations such as EMSA untouched, and we are particularly grateful to those who have supported us financially, who no doubt would prefer that we do not mention them by name. We are, nevertheless, grateful. As editor I am particularly indebted for the efforts of Kim Östman and Zachary Jones who not only bring a professional and academic eye to this journal, but also selflessly give of their time and talents. We also extend our appreciation to those who blind peer reviewed the articles and took time to review publications that have an international flavour. We hope as an editorial board that you will enjoy the contents of this issue.

MEANING AND AUTHORITY IN MORMON RITUAL

Walter E.A. van Beek

Doctrine without ritual is void,
Ritual without doctrine is blind.

Introduction

The description of any religion usually starts with what people believe, plus a founding story explaining its origins and some of the core elements of its creed. This also holds for Mormonism. Latter–day Saints (LDS) missionaries spread out over the world with a story, a tale about hierophanies and an exegetical discourse on what these new revelations are trying to teach humankind. Throughout, their approach is doctrinal. In this article I want to go against the current and to approach Mormonism through ritual to add another perspective on characteristic processes and paradoxes. Looking first at what people do in a religion and then what they think while doing has clear advantages. A reason for zooming in on Mormon ritual is one of relative neglect.

In LDS studies the relationship between history and the content of belief has been explored at large and, as far as ritual is concerned, good studies are available on the history of temple endowment.[1] However little has been done from the angle of Ritual Studies, and the relationship between ritual and cognitive content in particular needs attention. Here, I want to follow up on John Sorenson's early exploration of 'Ritual as Theology'[2] in which he states that 'ultimate questions about God and man may not be found in formal theology', but could be approached through ritual. This offers a good starting point as long as one talks about questions and not answers, as I explain later. Ritual is

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[1] David Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (San Francisco, Smith Associates, 1994). For an impression of publications on temple ritual, see James B. Allen, Ronald W. Walker & David J. Whittaker *Studies in Mormon History 1830–1997* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2000). Characteristically, the topical guide of this massive bibliography has no lemma "ritual." For a study on a non–Deseret temple, see Walter E.A. van Beek, 'Hierarchies of Holiness: The Mormon Temple in Zoetermeer, the Netherlands', in *Holy Ground: Reinventing Ritual Space in Modern Western Culture*, ed. by P. Post and A. Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), pp. 255–299.
[2] John Sorenson, 'Ritual as Theology', *Sunstone*, May–June 1981, 11–14.

much more important in LDS practice than is generally assumed. It is surprising that Mormonism is relatively rich in ritual, even if the discourse is on truth and doctrine, and not ritual. In fact, the term ritual is eschewed: 'We do not have ritual, we have ordinances'.[3] In a similar vein, the Roman Catholic Church has no ritual either: it has sacraments and liturgy. Ritual is seemingly what the rest of humanity has, and 'ours' is special. Yet, sacraments, liturgies and ordinances definitely belong to the general category of ritual and, as such, are comparable to other rituals elsewhere, both within and outside Christianity.

The second reason is that in the scholarly study of religion in the last decennia, ritual has come to the fore[4] and now offers a productive vista on Mormon rituals as well. Present theorizing focuses on ritual much more than on belief or myth, and ritual studies has become a flourishing sub–discipline of its own. Ritual is what all religions share and ritual is the most empirical expression of religion but we also immediately recognize ritual when we see it, even a foreign one. It is impossible for anthropologists arriving in a foreign culture to view belief or taste doctrine, but one can see and recognize ritual surprisingly easily.

A field experience: In my Dogon research station in Mali, I hosted a film team that included an Iroquois Indian. At a certain moment he started his own ritual of burning tobacco in the four cardinal directions. The Dogon who were present, my assistant, my host and my cook, immediately wanted to join in, bared their breasts and called out: 'Here, blow here'. They had instantly recognized the act as a ritual and

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[3] Sorenson, 'Ritual', p. 13.

[4] For instance, Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and *Ritual, Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bones: Re–inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); *Ritual and Religious Belief: A Reader*, ed. by G. Harvey (London: Equinox, 2005); *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, ed. by J. Snoeck & M. Stausberg (Leiden: Brill 2003); Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) and *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); D. Brown, *God and the Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). K. Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* ((London: Tavistock, 2005); *Holy Ground: Reinventing Ritual Space in Modern Western Culture*, ed. by P. Post and A. Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2010).

wanted to participate even though they knew nothing about the Iroquois religion, the history of the League or any doctrine but there was a ritual and they wanted to take part in it.

Not only is ritual easy to recognize, it also constitutes one of the most peculiar and contradictory types of human behaviour, engaging as it does in acts that are recognizably strange, have an unclear goal and meaning, and seem to have to direct effect. From the outside, ritual is strange and unusual behaviour but from the inside, for the participant, it is highly relevant, even crucial. The study of ritual encapsulates a constant search for meaning of acts which in themselves are more or less devoid of meaning.

It is this fundamental exegetic paradox of ritual that has generated a spate of publications over the last few decades from various angles: from practice theory to symbolism, from a performance approach to an evolutionary paradigm. Throughout, the notion that analyzing what people do, first, and what they think, later, has proved productive.[5] My general angle is a cognitive one, in particular the Modes of Religiosity Theory as put forward by Harvey Whitehouse,[6] an approach that not only uses ritual as its main entry point but also unites in one theory the whole array of religions with scripture (such as Christianity, Islam and Buddhism) and the traditional religions based upon oral transmission (like those in African that I have been studying for many years). The Modes Theory uses the varieties of ritual as the major key to understanding the different basic forms religions can take. Rituals are always clearly present in religions but differ in two significant ways, which field and experimental research has shown to be linked.

One way is in their frequency.[7] Some rituals are frequently performed (like the sacrament in LDS)m sometimes even daily (prayer), others are performed less often, maybe once a year (Christmas) or even less, like initiation rituals in African religions that can be performed at ten–yearly intervals, or perhaps only once in a life time. The second way is the intensity of the rites. Frequent rituals tend to be low in passion,

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[5] Bell, *Ritual, Perspectives and Dimensions*, p. 89.

[6] The crucial synopsis of the theory is Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission* (Oxford: Altamira Press, 2004), followed by many edited volumes in the same series "Cognitive Science of Religion."

[7] Here Whitehouse bases himself on, among others, R.N. McCauley and E.T. Lawson, *Bringing Ritual to Mind: Psychological Foundations of Cultural Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

i.e. do not evoke intense collective emotions (again, like the sacrament) but instead moments of introspection and quiet solitude and not of high energy interchange. On the other hand, rarely performed rituals are usually intense, with the type of emotional excitement Durkheim called 'effervescence'. The Dogon mask dance, for instance, that is organized each twelve years as a boys' initiation ceremony is a captivating spectacle full of intense participation that involves extensive preparations before the village puts on the huge show and hosts numerous guests. Weddings form an obvious example from our culture, as do royal coronations. This distinction between frequent + low excitement and infrequent + high excitement levels leads to two clusters of religious processes, two modes of religiosity called imagistic and doctrinal. The first (and oldest) mode of religion, the imagistic, combines low frequency with high-intensity rituals. The other, the doctrinal mode, capitalizes on frequent rituals and explicit learning that requires exegetic authority. In itself, this could be seen as the classic distinction between a traditional religion and a typical church-based one but that is neither the aim nor the case, as I will show in the Mormon example.

Rituals are important because they are crucial in the major challenge in any religion, namely that concepts and practices have to be remembered. Religious concepts tend to be either 'cognitively optimal' or 'cognitively costly'. The first are concepts that can easily be learned, are hard to forget and difficult even to unlearn. These are usually minimally counter-intuitive concepts, to use Pascal Boyer's term.[8] Concepts of the supernatural often closely resemble 'normal'[9] concepts of persons or things but are different in one crucial detail, which makes them, in Lévi-Straussian terms, 'easy to think'. An example is the notion of a ghost: a human in all respects but with no tangible body. Cognitively costly concepts are more complicated and have to be explained, taught and commented on, such as the 'Trinity', 'predestination', 'atonement',

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[8] P. Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Human Instincts that Fashion Gods, Spirits, and Ancestors* (London: Vintage Books, 2002); 'Cognitive Templates for Religious Concepts: Cross-cultural Evidence for Recall of Counter-intuitive Representations', *Cognitive Science*, 25, 535-564. His work has strongly influenced many other scholars, S. Atran, *In Gods We Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); S.E. Guthrie, *Faces in the Clouds. A New Theory of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and D. Sperber, *Explaining Culture: A Naturalistic Approach* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

[9] Boyer describes a minimal violation of a basic ontological category. See Boyer, *Religion Explained*, pp. 90-101.

'Nirwana', 'plan of salvation' or 'restoration', all of which are quite complex. These concepts are embedded in stories of the past, hierophanies and revelations and form the nucleus of reflection and systematic exegesis, continuously defined and redefined by complex reasoning and thoughtful speculation. They require a large cognitive investment, and are hence considered cognitively costly. These two opposites seem to be the focal points in religions, two 'attractor positions' to which religious concepts appear to gravitate. Religions focus on either of the two, and the mix is usually skewed. Why should this be so?

The theory highlights the causal connections between the collection of ritual features and the transmission of the religion and is not a typology but a logical pathway in which the features are connected and co-generated, in short, a dynamic interaction. Aspects of the imagistic and doctrinal processes are found in any religion, but given the logic connections between the ritual, concepts and organizations there tends to be a clustering either at the imagistic or the doctrinal point of gravity. Each religious tradition in its viable forms is then the result of the interplay of both modes, and shows dynamics of both. Mormonism in its own way can also be seen as a skewed interplay of both modes so we now turn to the characteristics of LDS rituals to highlight some of the paradoxes and puzzles of Mormonism.[10]

If we distinguish both frequent and infrequent rituals in Mormonism, we end up with a long list: Sorenson listed 47 'patently religious' rituals (e.g. sacraments, endowments), 39 semi-religious (e.g. home teaching) and 3 social rituals (e.g. wedding receptions). Mormonism is definitely rich in both frequent and rare rituals. How do these impinge on exegesis? I use two crucial rituals here: the sacraments and the endowment.

The Meaning of Frequent Ritual: Ritual Exegesis, Authority and Doctrine

The Modes Theory predicts that high-frequency rituals, which are usually low in excitement or intensity, tend to generate exegetic reflection controlled by the ecclesiastical authorities and to be combined with cognitively costly theological concepts. This is the fundamental 'attractor position' of a doctrinal mode and the prediction is easily borne out in part of Mormon ritual practice. If we take the weekly sacrament, the ritual is highly orchestrated and perfumed in silence and follows a

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[10] Following the lead of Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

very strict procedure known by all, in which each ritual participant partakes in private. This simple liturgy, just a blessing and the serving of bread and water, is central in Mormon ritual practice and is continuously commented upon and explained in an exegesis that includes other rituals, such as baptisms and the conferring of the Holy Ghost. General Authorities, lesson manuals and journal articles centre on the meaning of this ritual, using complicated conceptual themes. One is the series of sin, repentance and atonement, i.e. of the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ's vicarious suffering and redemption, while another is the cluster of notions cantering around the concept of the covenant.

Through the ritual, Mormon salvation is defined as a contract in which the priesthood is a facilitator of a bilateral covenant, both individual and collective, and the notion of election is present as a chosen people (where only members can partake) plus the agency of the individual who has his own responsibility for keeping the terms of the contract.[11] All this is thought to be present in a simple, frequently performed ritual of the taking of bread and water, if properly explained of course. A ritual such as the sacrament, through its frequency and its manifold exegesis, serves as a way of defining membership and informing processes of inclusion as well as exclusion. In its performance, the sacrament also underscores the status quo within the ward and the various ranks in the priesthood, with the gender inequalities that pertain to it.

Some infrequent rituals are drawn into these exegetic exercises. Baptism, though infrequent for those undergoing it, joins in its explication with the salvation theology of the sacrament. As Whitehouse correctly argues, these kinds of rites of passage are relatively frequent for those in charge, who are the ones who reflect and theologize.[12] Any child "born in the church" is from early childhood taught the importance of baptism, and meticulously prepared before the ritual, while afterwards it is discussed at length. It is a ritual which calls for exegesis and offers leeway for a layered explanation. Depending on the age of the person to be baptized, different aspects are adopted according to the comprehension of the person who is entering the fold. Thus exegesis moves from the washing away of sins to the signing of a covenant and finally participation in the death and resurrection of Christ. Rituals have the capacity to encapsulate exegesis at various levels and in different directions for

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[11] Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation; Force, Grace and Glory* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000).
[12] Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, p. 118.

the simple reason that they have no intrinsic meaning in themselves, and constitute an open invitation for exegetical reflection.[13]

A frequent ritual like the sacrament has a familiar liturgy and is easily remembered by all participants, even at a less conscious level.[14] Church leaders are instructed to watch for the right actions and to correct those who stray from the correct liturgy. In fact this seldom happens but horror tales of candle use during the sacrament – after WW II – are still present in Europe.[15] My point is not so much what these changes after a long period of isolation actually were, but it is the emotion of indignation itself that is relevant: changing a ritual on local initiative is unthinkable. Frequent rituals have to be performed in the right way as everybody will notice any deviation from the ritual, and straying from a ritual is considered bad. So the prayer formula in the sacrament is constantly monitored, the bishop nodding to the priests that it has been done correctly and that they can proceed. In addition, small sub–cultural rules become part of the liturgy and then a deacon that helps to serve the sacrament in another ward may inadvertently make mistakes. Some deacons in testimony meeting speak of the only proper way to serve, with their left hand behind, on their back. When I showed a few Dutch deacons a picture of a Utah deacon serving the sacrament in his ward, they were shocked: 'He has his left hand in his pocket' [an impolite gesture in the Netherlands] and then asked the typical question: 'Was he really worthy [of his position]?' Frequent ritual lives in the detail and an incorrectly performed ritual evokes a moral judgment.

Throughout, the LDS Church clearly exhibits its major processes in the doctrinal mode: rituals are repeated, knowledge is verbalized to a high degree, teaching is supremely important, and doctrine is developed and kept within the bounds of orthodoxy that are set by a clear and very visible leadership. Authority is highly developed and aims at guarding the limits of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, and is in full view throughout the ecclesiastical organization. Missionizing, another feature of the doctrinal mode, is extensive, occupies a large part of the internal discourse, and is even part of orthopraxy (for boys, at least). Roles and

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[13] Walter E.A. van Beek, *De rite is rond. Betekenis en boodschap van het ongewone*, Inaugural lecture, Tilburg University, 2007.

[14] Whitehouse refers here to "episodic memory," remembering the sequence of action. See Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity*, p. 103.

[15] The fact that these tales circulate in the form of horror stories – "look how far these people strayed" – is revealing in itself. After all, why candles form a serious infringement of the ritual is hard to explain.

positions within the community are narrowly defined and bolstered by orthodoxy and authority.

An important difference with Whitehouse's model are the professionals. While other Christians usually rely on professionals, both for local leadership and as the formulators of orthodoxy,[16] Mormonism knows neither. Its local leadership is made up of volunteers, but neither is the full-time leadership a professional one, i.e. in religious matters. There is no academic theological discourse in Mormonism, in fact the founders of the Church have taken a step back from the notion of theology, and today the word itself is hardly used.[17] Authority in Mormonism is tied to the organizational structure and not to specific knowledge about ritual or doctrine. Orthodoxy in Mormonism is guarded by an ecclesiastical structure that is not based on religious expertise. Experts in fact do not differ in knowledge or access to information from the rank and file. On the contrary, they accrue their religious authority from the position they occupy, a clear instance of Weber's positional charisma.[18] Authority in this fashion is so important that an orthodox exegesis of personal revelation bolsters institutional charisma, a discourse that mentions revelation-for-all but as some of the religious equals are more equal than others, some inspirations will be more relevant than others. Mormons talk about the 'burning in the bosom', but the most important question is not whether the bosom is burning but whose bosom is burning. In short, authority in Mormonism leads to revelation, not the reverse. The theology first celestialized spiritual experiences and tamed them: the spiritual process of revelation has been domesticated, with the credibility of 'revelation' or 'inspiration' depending less on content than on institutional position.

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[16] Whitehouse also mentions large anonymous communities in the doctrinal mode but these are kept small in the LDS Church. They are not anonymous at all and are the result of a conscious policy plus the lay ecclesiastical structure.

[17] Brigham Young University does not have a Department of Theology but a Department of Religion.

[18] A charismatic source of authority and visions was important in the early phase of the Church but has been relinquished almost completely, D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy, Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), p. 4. Or, in the words of Terryl Givens: "From the standpoint of church government, Joseph learned quickly, a church full of prophets was a holy bedlam," (*People of Paradox*, p. 10).

This situation of a lay authority explains another puzzle in Mormonism regarding the question of creed. On the one hand, Joseph Smith once said that:

> Latter-day Saints have no creed, but are ready to believe all true principles that exist, as they are made manifest from time to time.[19]

On the other hand, he himself delivered a host of new teachings, thus establishing a distinctive and constantly evolving body of doctrine (the word, after all, means 'teaching') that was later ratified and is now fixed in the present-day LDS Church.[20] In recent history, the influence of the famous Correlation Committee has been crucial in streamlining all teaching in church manuals and publications, taking care to harmonize all contradictory statements.[21] Scholars studying the Church are often at pains to pinpoint LDS doctrines[22] as there is no authoritative creed or definitive formulation of belief. The Articles of Faith are often considered to be just that but they contain a hint of creedal content and crucial items are absent.[23] Yet the Saints themselves feel that they know precisely what the doctrine is and internally there seems to be no uncertainty about content. How is this possible? Following Joseph, the first obvious answer would be that the body of teachings is still open and developing, but this no longer holds true. The last revelation was in 1978, after an interval of 61 years, which itself had come 71 years after the previous one. But the doctrine of continuous revelation could offer a reason for not striving for a formalized creed. Although the present Saints consider their body of doctrine to be more or less complete, concept of 'closed

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[19] Joseph Smith, "In Reply to Mr. Butterfield," cited in Givens, *People of Paradox*, p. 28.

[20] Ludlow, *Encyclopedia*, p. 393 ff.

[21] This committee, whose task was in fact more one of coordination than correlation, was the child of Harold B. Lee, as an influential apostle and later president. It was the means by which the top leadership assumed control over all other organizations within the Church, especially publications and teaching. See D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), p. 105.

[22] Douglas Davies, *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[23] For instance, the Plan of Salvation or anything pertaining to the temple.

revelations' is counter–doctrinal and anyway members do not feel the need for an authoritative formulation.

The key to this puzzle resides in the Mormon concept of authority. It is one of defining doctrinal mode dynamics mentioned by Whitehouse, and as authority is positional in the LDS Church and not based on specific expertise. All authorities have more or less the same power base, namely their position. Of course the prophet has a special position,[24] but he is a primus inter pares, whatever the discourse within the Church, and always comes from the ranks of the other General Authorities: he is the 'ancient one' with the longest track record and is best known as such. With positional authority as the deciding factor in the construction and exposition of doctrine, the Brethren[25] are understandably reticent about arguing among themselves as deference to authority is the one and only power base, and disunity would erode theirs. So they never contradict one another, living or dead, at least not in public.[26] The public discourse is one of unanimous harmony, which keeps the authority structure intact, quite a challenge for a large body of assertive men. As for doctrine, they cannot contradict directly any saying of any General Authority in the present or in the past, which makes for an array of never refuted theological discourse.

A special case is the Adam God doctrine proposed by Brigham Young,[27] which generated a lot of debate at the time. This was one doctrine which found no acceptance with Young's peers, and it never caught on, a situation he even complained about.[28] Eventually that particular doctrine was sent to Coventry, even to the point that present–day General Authorities deny a prophet of God ever propounded it.

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[24] And with a built–in tension between the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles. See Quinn, *Extensions of Power*, pp. 21–60.

[25] The colloquial Mormon expression for the First Presidency plus the Council of the Twelve.

[26] Quinn analyzes at length the quandary or "twin charges" of the apostles: the stand for their convictions and inspiration on the one hand, and to preserve unanimity in their decisions. Quinn, *Extensions of Power*, pp. 11–15.

[27] David J. Buerger, 'The Adam-God Doctrine', *Dialogue*, 15 (Spring 1982), 14–58.

[28] D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy, Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), p. 36.

Thus the doctrinal debate is neither concluded nor refuted, but muted.[29] So the very definition of religious authority in Mormonism means that doctrines change by fading away, sometimes helped by the rewriting of history. The present distinction between core and peripheral doctrines on the church website[30] may stimulate the decline of secondary discourses. To paraphrase a popular song text: 'Old doctrines never die, they just fade away'.

Looking back on the development of doctrine in the Church, it is astonishing how much has changed. Some members who try to hold the Church to its 19th century revelations view the changes as problematic[31] but most go with the flow because of increasing clarity and adaptation to the modern world. Faded discourses form the core of Mauss's book on racial and racialist discourses[32] and thus on ethnic discourses, like the 'Ephraim discourse. But doctrines that were central in the 19th century have slipped away although some did involve an internal struggle. The case of polygamy is an obvious example of a major church–wrenching change in direction, which was highly disputed and saw significant external pressure. The 1978 change in priesthood attribution came from external but also internal pressure, the discussion starting a long time before the change was implemented as a high–profile addition to the scriptures.[33] However, both changes were essentially welcomed by most of the church membership and met little internal resistance once the right authority was established for the new directive. Most changes have, however, been less visible. The notion of Gathering,[34] for instance, has completely gone, whereas it was considered one of

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[29] What is interesting in this respect is the treatment of the doctrine in the semi–official *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. The lemma "Adam–God doctrine" just refers to "Teachings of Brigham Young." In that section, however, it only says: "I could tell you much more about this," he said, speaking of the role of ADAM, but checked himself, recognizing that the world would probably misinterpret his teaching." *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 4, ed. by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: MacMillan, 1992), p. 1610.

[30] http://www.lds.org.

[31] Menno Feenstra, *Samuel*, Unpublished manuscript.

[32] Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press 2003).

[33] See Quinn, *Extensions of Power*, pp. 143–150.

[34] Gathering is the doctrine that all Saints have to move to the center of the Restored Church, first in Kirtland, then in Nauvoo and later in Utah. After that the doctrine died a soft death.

the hallmarks of nineteenth-century Mormonism.[35] With the proviso that from the early twentieth century onwards all "international"[36] members would be international, the notion of gathering disappeared. One other consequence is that Zion is less talked about. The phrase 'the building up of Zion' has completely disappeared from Church parlance, though it is still in the 10th Article of Faith.[37] If 'Zion' is fading, so is mention of Israel as an LDS model. Recently I talked about the notion of 'Latter-day Israel' with a class of young Dutch adults who had all been raised in the Church. They looked at me blankly, not understanding what I was talking about: they had never heard the term before! The declining of the 'gathering'–'Zion'–'Israel' discourse has a lot to do with the delay of the Second Coming, but also with the internationalization of the Church. These particularistic notions had to move backstage for the Church to internationalize.

However, fading does not imply disappearance or disavowal. The faded discourses remain a font of inspiration, as a treasure trove for those who like to proclaim 'strong doctrine', shake up sacrament meetings or want a good topic for a doctrinal book.[38] In fact, the Second Coming is among them. If the Church was to be named today, the term 'latter day' would probably not be included in the name; talk of the return is not frequently heard. But faded discourses are never out of fashion: when asked whether they believe in any of these discourses, members will always assert that they do, as they form part and parcel of a body of potentially retrievable beliefs.

Another side of the same coin is public denial. Viewing its socially explosive past doctrines, like polygamy, the strategy of publicly

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[35] As the hymn went: "A Church without a gathering is not the Church for me; /The Savior would not own it, wherever it might be." Quinn, *Extensions of Power*, pp. 316–317.

[36] I.e. members of the International Church, the church outside the USA and Canada.

[37] In the hymn book used until the 1980s, 36 of the 220 hymns mentioned Zion but significantly fewer did so after the last "correlation" of the Church hymns.

[38] An example is Marvin van Dam's recent book, *Mine Elect Hear my Voice: The Gathering of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Leatherwood Press, 2006), which mainly consists of scripture quotes without reference to the present or to Mauss's book. See note 17. Other books that go against the current are often of apocalyptic nature and include: Hoyt W. Brewster, *Behold, I Come Quickly; The Last Days and Beyond* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).

denying private facts became the norm for a time, made possible by the fuzziness of doctrines. The denial of Brigham Young involvement in the Adam God theory is a less public fact but Hinckley's denial of the fundamental unity of man and God – as man is God once was, as God is man will be – on national TV was a more public and publicized instance of the same tendency. Outwardly, a doctrine is deniable if the denial is done by those who protect the orthodoxy.

The notion of exegetic control is therefore complex in Mormonism. The exegetic paradox resides in the fact that there is authority, but no authoritative voice. The absence of dispute, ironically, produces flexible doctrine, which results in a strategy of remaining as safe as possible in new statements from any authoritative chair. Those authorities that do engage in systematic exegesis are constantly being scrutinized by their peers. However even if restrained to some extent by their peers when they pursue their exegetical publications, these peers cannot do a lot about it. McConkie's doctrinal encyclopaedia[39] is a case in point; drawing criticism from his peers because of his outspoken and personal views on doctrine, although it was eventually published and became influential. One of the goals of the much later and better supervised Encyclopedia of Mormon Doctrine[40] and which is considered semi-official now was to replace McConkie's volume, but the Encyclopedia did not enjoy the same circulation. And in the end, LDS systematic exegetic reflection is a silent struggle for in-Church exposure with the Mormon press as its arena, among authorities that do not contradict each other.

Infrequent LDS Ritual: Endowment and Orality

Infrequent rituals with their intense participation, the Modes Theory predicts, do not lead to authoritative exegesis, and spontaneous exegetical reflection comes to the fore. In these rituals the major problem is how, in what order and in what way rituals should be performed. This tends to avoid the question of why. This is the core of the imagistic process, and one of the peculiarities in LDS Mormonism is that it situates itself inside the other 'attractor position' to a surprisingly high degree. Consequently, the interplay between its imagistic dynamics and doctrinal mainstream processes offers a peculiar window on LDS ritual. We now turn to endowment, as the other ritual.

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[39] Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).
[40] See note 15.

The LDS Church defines itself as a temple–building church and, as such, is already a stranger in contemporary Christendom. By introducing temple endowments, Jan Shipps remarked that Joseph Smith had changed Mormonism from being an ecclesiastical church into a mystery religion,[41] a religion into which one has to be initiated during a secret ritual. Initiations are in principle once–in–a–lifetime experiences and the epitome of imagistic high–impact rituals. In religion dominated by imagistic processes, initiation often aims at procreation and is always highly somatic. After all, the ritual has to change the individual, not only adding knowledge but also impacting on the body. In initiation rituals, the boys usually follow the deeds and exploits of the groups' ancestors and cultural heroes and of the 'first' people, and the re–enactment of their deeds and symbolic tests provide the main body of the initiation.

The endowment consists of a typical initiation rite that shares other characteristics like additional knowledge and somatic impact as it prepares the candidates for full spiritual adulthood and their journey through life and life after death. So the Mormon temple experience is a crucial part of a shared humanity, exhibiting characteristics of the imagistic mode. Here I highlight two: the traditional nature of the transmission and the exegetical reflection combined with an experiential definition of learning. Finally, I touch on a major peculiarity in temple rituals: the fact that these high–impact rituals are repeated even under the aegis of eternity.

The Church began with a temple obsession. When Nauvoo was just starting, Joseph Smith was already keen to start work on new temples. On 4 May 1842 he introduced the endowment ceremony for the first time to a select group of nine members and, as in Kirtland, well before the temple was finished. The ritual was taught by example and instruction in the upper room of the Nauvoo store of the prophet, after elaborate preparations.[42] Smith himself left no record of how the rites were generated nor did he write them down or recorded them to a scribe except for a short statement 'that all these things were always governed by the principle of revelation'.[43] However this remark is more a comment by Willard Richards, the editor of the History, than a quote by Smith. There is no text underlying the ceremonies or a direct revelation (which were numerous in the Nauvoo days) or an old text. The endowment is

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[41] Jan Shipps, *Mormonism; The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 61.

[42] Buerger, *Mysteries*, p. 36.

[43] *History of the Church*, vol. 5 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964), p. 2.

essentially an orally transmitted ritual, complicated and elaborate but oral. Not only does it echo its Masonic inspiration but it also links it with ritual expressions the world over. This has several consequences. One is the notion of change, especially the discourse on change. In Mormonism, the authorities discourage speaking about changes in rituals, and temple workers and presidencies are instructed to state that the temple rituals have always been the same and that no major changes have taken place. Historically this is not correct but there is rhyme and reason in the statement. Many of the changes had to do with gently ousting Masonic influence, which does not have to be at the core of LDS rituals. But there were other changes too and the whole habitus of the temple services has changed dramatically since the first Nauvoo initiation, which lasted for hours and was interlaced with violin music and square dancing,[44] to the streamlined present–day version on film.

Here a short comparison with other imagistic processes might be helpful. Whenever Africans perform a ritual, they always tell the interested outsider (read ethnographer)[45] that this has been done 'since the ancestors', that this is tradition and has not changed through the ages. The ethnographic and historical reality is different though. Rituals do change and rituals that are not codified, as in African traditional religions, change quite quickly in fact. But while changing a ritual, people retain the discourse on tradition, timelessness and the preservation of the past, 'since the ancestors'. Thus tradition is not so much a historical referent but an argument of authority: things are seen as old, and thus have authority. The notion of tradition is invoked precisely to give authority to present–day practices.

Temple ritual in Mormonism has exactly this cognitive slot, authority by purportedly ancient roots. There is no written text from which it is generated[46] and yet it claims a very old heritage. It derives its authen-

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[44] Buerger, *Mysteries*, p. 86.

[45] I have researched two African traditional religions at length, the Kapsiki in northern Cameroon and the Dogon of Mali. W.E.A. van Beek, *The Dancing Dead: Ritual and Religion among the Kapsiki and Higi of North Cameroon and North-eastern Nigeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); W.E.A. van Beek *Dogon: Africa's People of the Cliffs* (New York: Abrams, 2001).

[46] The whole procedure was eventually codified, first in 1877, again in 1924 and later in many different languages: Buerger, *Mysteries*, p. 25. Each temple has a temple handbook on its premises for the temple presidencies and the temple staff to consult. This handbook never leaves the temple. For the procedures to

ticity from its supposedly ancient history, a myth of origin that is gener-ated by the very authority that commands and changes rituals.[47] The temple ritual is effectively a piece of non–written religion, as a classic mystery religion inside a Christian church.

From an anthropological viewpoint, any ritual has to change in order to adapt to new circumstances: rituals have to be dynamic and change over time to generate similar experiences for participants who live in a changing world. Such a ritual, on the other hand, may well function under an ideological umbrella that generates a discourse of 'tradition', as a door into eternity, so the gentle distortion of historical reality – 'the ritual has never changed' – is part and parcel of that adapta-tion to a changing world. As a consequence, the very changes in temple ritual render it constant, and the official denial of change is part of that process.[48] Whatever the surface motivation for restraining to speak about change and the actual awareness of the authorities of the many changes through history may be, they show in their denial a deep appreciation of what constitutes ritual, just like the elders in African religions.

Endowment and the Quest for Meaning

The thorniest problem surrounding ritual still remains: its in-terpretation and meaning. In 1981 Sorenson noted increasing ritual activity and decreasing theology in the Church,[49] and associated this tendency with the Americanization and internationalization of the Church. I agree with the symptoms but have a different diagnosis. One theoretical difference is that he sees rituals as a language and a text and as a didactic enterprise with a teacher or officiator: 'The mysteries of godliness cannot be expounded through purely linguistic discourse, but only through ritual'. The notion of didactics is, in my view, interesting but slightly misleading. Recent debates on ritual, which have taken off since the 1980s, point in the opposite direction, and the dynamics Sorenson mentioned can be better explained, I think, through the Modes Theory. As with symbols, the building blocks of rituals, studies

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implement changes used by the Temple Department, see van Beek, 'Hierarchies of Holiness', p. 287.

[47] Masonic ritual shares these aspects.

[48] See for an extensive treatment of the taboo on writing aspects, Kathleen Flake '"Not to be Writen": The Mormon Temple Ritual as Oral Canon', *Journal of Ritual Studies*, 9 (1995), 1–21.

[49] Sorenson, 'Ritual', p. 14.

have demonstrated that the notion of ritual as language is not productive and distorts more than it clarifies. Religious studies have distanced themselves from any 'cryptological' approach.[50] Ritual and symbolism are not a crypto language, not a code to be cracked, nor is symbolism for that matter (sorry, Dan Brown). The present outlook, which I share, is that ritual is an act that has been made special by changing a portion of a 'normal' act, a change which in principle empties it of its meaning in everyday life.[51] This change emptied normal acts of their intrinsic meaning, creating a semantic void. For instance, a sacrifice is based around a family meal, eating with guests, but the guest (the godhead) is invisible during the sacrificial meal and does not really eat. Such a restricted but basic change generates a series of characteristics of ritual: separation in time and place, specific language and outfit to mention but a few.

This has important consequences for the notion of meaning in ritual. Viewing ritual as a changed natural act means that the act has been emptied of its normal everyday meaning. Thus, a ritual has no intrinsic message to its participants or viewers but does accrue meaning. After all, every participant in a ritual finds it 'meaningful'. Or in the words of Anthony Wallace,[52] ritual does not contain information (the 'message') but does acquire meaning. So the meaning of a ritual does not stem directly from the act itself but has to be constructed by participants, either lay participants or experts. By virtue of being a recognizable act that has been emptied of its normal meaning, ritual is an invitation for active construction of meaning.

Ritual meaning is constructed at two levels. The first is universal: the rite signals that this is a ritual. Like the Dogon who immediately recognized an Amerindian ritual, one thing is clear to all participants. They are performing a ritual and should behave accordingly: 'participation implies submission to the liturgical order'.[53] When in the ritual, one has to follow the rules. This self–referential meaning defines ritual as a special act that creates a special occasion and demands particular atten-

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[50] Roy Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion, in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 67 ff.

[51] For an overview, see Van Beek, *De rite is rond*, and Bell, *Ritual, Pespectives and Dimensions*, chapter 5; Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion*, chapter 4; Boyer, *Religion Explained*, chapter 7.

[52] Anthony F.C. Wallace, *Religion, an Anthropological View* (New York: Random House, 1966).

[53] Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 145.

tion.[54] The whole habitus of the temple is geared towards making this abundantly clear: it is a sacred – 'holy' in LDS parlance – place. The Mormon holy place is designed and dedicated just for rituals, and is built around the ordinances. The famous French anthropologist Lévi–Strauss defined rituals as 'machines à supprimer le temps', instruments to suppress time, as life during rituals is portrayed as being untouched by history. Patrons experience the ritual as 'a time out of time', 'a world out of the world' and if the temple services are defined as 'work', ritual is also an act out of time, all of which accrues to the self–referential aspect of ritual.

It is the second level of meaning that is the most discussed: the exegetical or canonical[55] meaning. In addition to being a ritual, what does it 'mean'? Frits Staal, a famous Hindologist, explicitly stated that rituals have no meaning at all, that they are inherently without sense.[56] He is partly right: ritual defines itself as a ritual, and after that it has no proper information of its own, no intrinsic message. However, the exegetical paradox mentioned above is that people all attribute great meaning to rituals, insist on their proper procedure first but also get inspiration from them. The solution to this puzzle is that the semantic void of ritual – as normal behaviour made strange – is an invitation to signification. People fill the empty semantic space of ritual with their own meaning, thus creating their own interpretation, their own exegesis. This is exactly why ritual is often 'do–it–yourself religion'[57] anyway. Of course, a ritual does give clues for interpretation, some handles in the form of the symbols used, the language (not always as important as in LDS rituals!) and the 'normal' act the ritual is modelled on. However these are always multimodal and open to interpretation, and they appeal to a variety of emotions, cognitions and memory. The whole ritual is not a specific given puzzle but a puzzle the participant has to construct for him/herself first, and then solve.

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[54] Jonathan Smith sees ritual as essentially "drawing attention." See Smith, *To Take Place*, p. 105.

[55] The term Rappaport uses.

[56] F. Staal, 'The Meaninglessness of Ritual', *Numen*, 26, no. 1, 2–22; F. Staal, *Rules without Meaning: Ritual, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1989).

[57] The apt characterization by Mark Leone of practical LDS theology. See M. Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 188.

From the viewpoint of the Modes Theory, the LDS temple ritual, i.e. its own endowment, seems to be a classic case of an infrequent and complex ritual without exegesis. Its main type is that of an initiation, and its model in the daily world is that of a journey, an aspect it shares with many initiation rituals, but then a journey made 'strange'. Indeed the first experience, as many new patrons testify, is one of strangeness. This is for two reasons. First, it is an encompassing, overwhelming ritual and, as such, presents a virtual world of its own that shouts to participants that it is a ritual and a very special one at that, one full of the unexpected. So the self-referential meaning is evident: this is a ritual, even the ritual. Second, this kind of ritual has become a stranger in our time, as mystery initiations have become rare in a culture of transparency and super-information, leading to a sense of alienation that can go either of two ways. Some people experience it as a weird ritual never to be participated in again but most patrons see it as a not-yet-understood spiritual experience and keep coming back to the temple, gradually starting their own private interpretation. The latter, evidently, is what the leadership hopes for. For the present-day Saints, it is also very different from all other rituals in the Church, and it thus creates a large semantic void: the endowment generates a host of questions. That void has to be filled. But by who? The rites are never explained; temple preparation lessons never touch on the content of the rites themselves nor do they offer tools for interpretation. The party that controls the ritual, the church leadership, does not provide an exegesis and simply does not answer the many questions arising from the strange ritual. Any explanation of the ritual is precluded: 'the Spirit has to furnish'. At least one General Authority is on record as stating that he understands only 5% of the endowment. The very same leadership that avoids standard interpretations also tries to control the discourse on it, and prohibits systematic discussion.

One temple president in Zollikofen, fired by his own studies, started teaching patrons the possible messages imbued in ceremonies during prayer meetings that at that time were still held before actual ceremonies. Though his explanations were appreciated by the visiting members, he was told to stop them shortly before his term was over. And stop he did, though he did finish his term.

There is a conspicuous lack of standard interpretation of ritual; in fact there is no interpretation at all. Anyone with questions about the interpretation of symbolism, according to present instructions, is told to pray for the Spirit who will provide the answers through spiritual inspira-

tion to anyone asking diligently. Whitehouse talks about 'spontaneous exegesis' and that is what is happening here, which inevitably leads to divergent interpretations, but in the LDS case the interchange on these interpretations is blocked. In short, the semantic void of ritual is heightened, which is meant to be used as a stimulus for personal reflection and a personalized relation with the godhead.

Mormon discourse on the temple heightens this exegetic paradox: the temple is continually referred to as a 'house of learning' and when talks in sacrament meetings or stake or general conferences deal with the temple, this aspect is always touched upon. Yet while the temple ritual may have an officiator, it definitely does not have a teacher. Though the temple is surrounded by a discourse on continuous learning,[58] when asked what one learns, people are at a loss for an answer. That is normal for rituals, as ritual experiences are notoriously difficult to verbalize, but this is perpendicular to the discourse on learning. Some apologists have taken up this challenge and gone into the 'language of symbolism'[59] but they too shy away from interpretations of the total ritual.[60] And of course, the strong insistence on secrecy precludes any discussion beyond the temple walls, while patrons have no time for lengthy discussions within the temple itself. Private exegesis has to be in private, never in public, not even with other members, so very little systematic exegesis is produced. Mauss argues that patrons may learn aspects that are unintended, such as the introduction of film that visualizes aspects that are left open in the verbal discourse,[61] which is correct but holds too for the whole ritual as it is highly questionable whether any specific meaning has ever consciously been intended.

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[58] For a thorough analysis of the place of education in Mormonism, see S–H. Trigeaud: *Conversion, éducation et communauté. Une étude socio–anthropologique, transnationale et contemporaine des pratiques et représentations des 'Saints des Derniers Jours' ou 'Mormons'* (Paris: Ph.D. thesis at EHESS, 2008).

[59] For example, A.L. Gaskill: *The Lost Language of Symbolism. An Essential Guide for Recognizing and Interpreting Symbols of the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003).

[60] Symbols are then usually approached as a language, as a cryptology that teaches the inner crowd while shielding the sacred elements from curious outsiders. This view of symbolism is outdated in Religious Studies but the notion of symbol remains more a problem than a productive element in the LDS discourse.

[61] Such as the physical appearance of Adam, Eve and the Godhead: Mauss, 'Culture, Charisma and Change' (1987). The same holds for aspects of the story of the Creation.

Routinization of Imagistic Ritual

One peculiar aspect, which makes the endowment an extremely interesting case, is its repetition. Historically, proxy rituals came after the introduction of the own endowments in Nauvoo but today's proxy rituals for the kindred (and not-so-kindred) dead dominate. So high-impact initiation rituals are repeated and often become the norm, the goal and even the very raison d'être of the temple. High-arousal rituals, such at the Dogon one mentioned earlier, are very rarely performed but that does not mean that high-impact rituals cannot be routinized. Pentecostal religions do just that, every week, and the same holds for the LDS endowment. The LDS endowment is strange and captivating when entered into for the first time, sometimes even quite disconcerting,[62] but due to its quiet liturgy, it is more high impact than high arousal. In fact, a series of changes in the endowment ritual have gradually reduced the corporeal effects of the initiation journey in favour of a more contemplative ritual.[63] Still, no LDS ever forgets his/her first endowment. As an experience it is unforgettable, in every sense of the word. The Modes Theory mentions the 'flash bulb' memory, the imprinting of unique experiences, the memory of which never disappears. Hierophanies are an excellent example of these, like the Joseph Smith ones, but intense personal experiences too. The temple ritual seems geared to produce this kind of shock experience.

What is the effect of routinization? Whitehouse mentions that all initiations are undergone once but assisted at many times, first as a youngster, latter as an elder. This helps in establishing the correct and much-needed 'episodic memory', the memory of the sequence of the liturgy, establishing the orthopraxy of the ritual and setting out how the ritual is done. This may pose a problem for rare rituals.

Dogon mask dances are performed every twelve years, which may seem a long time to remember the exact sequence of ritual elements. However, the main aspects to be learnt are the mask dances themselves and these are practised regularly several times a year at every funeral. In this day and age, these dances are performed at tourist shows and cultural festivals too. The sequence of constituent events can be a problem. During the last mask ritual I witnessed, in 2008, a conflict arose between two village halves in Tireli, and one of the issues was precisely about

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[62] Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 163-166.
[63] Van Beek, 'Hierarchies of Holiness', p. 289.

what should be done first. The liturgy had become an arena here. This holds even more so for the sigi, a Dogon ritual that is performed every 60 years. How can the proper procedures of a ritual that one almost never sees be safeguarded? Young specialists are educated in ritual lore during the ritual itself but they will be at least 75 by the time of the next instalment (and will probably be dead by then). The solution is twofold. One, the liturgy in itself is simple and the relevant points are embedded in the songs and tales people know anyway. The second is to have an intermediate generation, the sigi teachers, who are taught by specialists and then teach the next generation.

In the case of the endowment, such a problem arose when Joseph Smith died shortly after demonstrating the ritual to a select few. After his death they had to reconstruct the complex ritual, a combined effort of memory as there was no text.[64] Gradually the ritual was codified, and has consequently changed over the 150 years since it was first set up. The first result of routinization is thus the homogenization of ritual, the codification, regulation and hierarchical control over the ritual. Ritual control is absolute in the case of temple rituals. The idea that a temple president would be inspired to change the endowment sounds ludicrous to a Mormon, which highlights the absolute control of the hierarchy over this ritual, in fact over all ritual.

Ritual control in the Church is clearer than creedal orthodoxy. Rituals are described in great detail in the General Handbook of Instruction, and each priesthood bearer knows the small booklets of ordinance descriptions that cover how they should be done. For the temple, these instructions are not required as each temple has a direct, 24-hour manned line to the Temple Department at Church Headquarters in Salt Lake City. The process of implementing changes, which comes straight from the top, is tightly supervised and surrounded by elaborate security guarantees.[65] Ritual control is so central for the Church that even in Africa, where almost all churches eventually give in to the forces of Africanization, the LDS Church has remained remarkably resistant to any indigenization of its ritual: no dancing, no drumming, no adaptation to the continent of our ancestry. Ritual control comes under the heading of 'unity in the church' but the difference between unity and uniformity is not always evident in Mormonism.

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[64] Buerger, *Mysteries*, p. 69 ff.
[65] Van Beek, 'Hierarchies of Holiness', p. 287.

Routinization of imagistic ritual has a definite effect on the definition of doctrine. In my view, there is one additional factor for the doctrinal 'flattening' Sorenson noted, i.e. the fading of the more distinctive Mormon doctrines in favour of more general Christian theological notions. Given the fact that elaborate ritual is hard to interpret and that interpretative discourses are discouraged, repetition of ritual has two effects. First, a sense of habituation sets in, as the questions of the first experience get dulled through repetitive exposure to the same ritual. The gentle hierophanies of the first endowment will give way to a general discourse on temple holiness and then to pride in knowing the whole procedure by heart, especially at the crucial points in the journey. The thirst for explanation is quenched by liturgical expertise but the need for systematic doctrine as an underpinning of the now frequent ritual will keep coming up, as questions are likely to linger. Most focus on details of the ritual as these embody most of the strangeness, but this disappears with increased familiarity. What remains then is the need for reflection on the more general thrust of the initiation, which results in a kind of exegetical quandary between secrecy and meaning, and between lack of exegesis and the need to address individual experiences. It is this quandary that stimulates the kind of theological discourse that is produced by the General Authorities these days, a discourse that avoids thorny exegetical questions. Clearly, they no longer concentrate on old, faded issues but on the ways an individual could make sense of his own personal situation. Atonement, for one, is a major part of current LDS doctrinal discourse and fits well between the doctrinal development of the frequent ritual of the sacrament and the routinized experience of temple sacredness, between the doctrinal and the imagistic mode.

In this ritual approach, Mormonism shows an interesting interplay between the dynamics of the two modes, imagistic and doctrinal, an apt illustration of the maxim at the start of this article by Immanuel Kant, which I have adapted: 'Doctrine without ritual is void, ritual without doctrine is blind'. At first glance, the Church seems almost a stereotypical case of a doctrinal mode but then the paradoxes step in. Doctrinal definition and control are much more complex, not because of a lack of authority but because of the Mormon definition of intense positional authority. But Mormonism is rich in ritual and some of the rituals are imagistic, as if belonging to a different religion and bearing the hallmarks of the oral traditions that all religions started out with, which also impinges upon exegetical processes. In a tightly controlled

church, the ultimate challenge is thus to 'do it yourself', both in exegesis and daily orthopraxy.

Whatever complex and many–stranded relationship individual Mormons may have with their leadership, and whatever the intensive discourse on doctrinal and truth, experiential dynamics ultimately come to the fore. Several researches have shown that in times of need, people do not relate to doctrine or theology or to the complex and cognitively costly structures devised by the churches but to an immediate relationship with the other world, to a recognition of the closeness of the supernatural. If you truly need religion, forget doctrine. Ultimately, religion is imagistic, as the central feature is just a relationship, just knowing, in Mormon parlance, that you have a Father in Heaven and that He loves you. The rest is silence.